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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)
SUBJECT: GCC ADVISOR: VISIT TO ISFAHAN NUCLEAR FACILITY
CONFIRMS SUSPICIONS; GCC MORE AWARE OF IRANIAN THREAT

REF: A. KUWAIT 3618
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 1346
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 677

Classified By: CDA Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: In an October 9 meeting with PolChief, Advisor to the GCC Secretary General Dr. Sami Al-Faraj shared his impressions of a two-day conference sponsored by the Expediency Council he attended in April that included a visit to the Isfahan nuclear facility. Al-Faraj, who regularly travels to Iran, noted the large number of military personnel in Tehran and particularly at the Isfahan nuclear facility, which left the conference participants doubting the facility was being used solely for peaceful purposes. Speakers at the conference, including Rafsanjani and Larijani, blamed problems in the region on the presence of foreign troops. Notably absent was any mention of the GCC, Egypt, or Jordan in discussions on regional issues. Al-Faraj also commented on the GCC's reaction to regional developments. He said the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict crystallized GCC countries' awareness of the seriousness of the Iranian threat and strengthened their commitment to providing economic assistance to Iraq to counter Iranian influence there. Initially wary, GCC countries are increasingly accepting of a Shi'a government in Iraq and have been reassured by senior Iraqi Shi'a clerics' calls for moderation and calm, he concluded. End summary.

Read Out of Visit to Iran

[1](#)2. (C/NF) PolChief met October 9 with Dr. Sami Al-Faraj, an advisor to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary General and the founder and director of the Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies (KCSS), a private strategic research and consulting firm. In April, Al-Faraj attended a two-day conference in Iran sponsored by the Expediency Council and organized by the Pugwash Conferences of Science and World Affairs, a Nobel Prize-winning NGO opposed to nuclear weapons, along with approximately 30 other participants from around the region, including several Indian and Iraqi nuclear scientists. The first day featured lectures by more than 30 leading Iranian officials, including former president Rafsanjani and Ali Larijani, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Al-Faraj said there was some "slight" difference in the views presented -- for example, Rafsanjani tried to take credit for Iran's nuclear program -- but all the speakers blamed the region's problems on the presence of foreign troops, a view he said was "completely at odds" with that of Gulf countries. Al-Faraj said "pragmatists" like Rafsanjani and Larijani presented stronger arguments than more hard-line speakers, while military and intelligence

officials tended to contradict themselves. He cited an example of one intelligence official who claimed Iran had no presence in Iraq, but later said with assurance that there were 41 Sunni terrorists groups in Iraq.

¶4. (C/NF) Al-Faraj said the speakers' arguments all seemed to be based on some fundamental, unquestioned assumptions, such as that any U.S. attack on Iran would be of a limited nature against the country's nuclear facilities, and that Iran would take its nuclear program "underground." Al-Faraj was also struck by the speakers' complete silence on the Gulf. He said Iranian officials only talked about the U.S., Britain, and Iraq when discussing the region; the GCC, Egypt, and Jordan were never mentioned. When visiting Abu Dhabi days after the conference, Larijani delivered a very different message to GCC countries, Al-Faraj claimed.

¶5. (C/NF) On the last day of the conference, the group was taken on an unannounced visit to the Isfahan nuclear facility. Accompanying them were military personnel, who radioed ahead to block traffic on the roads and intersections they passed through. Al-Faraj said there was a "strong" military presence at the facility, leaving the conference participants convinced that the facility had some sort of military function. Al-Faraj, who visits Iran several times a year, was surprised by the lack of Basij and IRGC forces on the streets, despite a media report the week before he left saying these forces were cracking down on dress code violators, something he saw no evidence to support.

Growing Awareness of Iranian Threat, But Still Unprepared

¶6. (C/NF) Prior to the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict, GCC

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countries were reluctant to confront Iran over its nuclear program or policies in the region, Al-Faraj said. Now, there is an increasing awareness that something must be done -- "politically, strategically, economically, or militarily" -- to contain Iran regionally, or, as he put it, to "clip the claws of the lion." According to Al-Faraj, this awareness had been growing since the beginning of the year, but crystallized with the conflict in Lebanon. Kuwait became more fully aware of the threat from Iran during Ahmadinejad's visit in February (ref C), he said. The Kuwaiti leadership wanted to know if Ahmadinejad was really serious and were convinced in their meetings with him that he was "seriously crazy," Al-Faraj claimed. He noted that the afternoon Ahmadinejad left Kuwait, the Amir instructed Kuwait's emergency services agencies to begin emergency/disaster planning preparations (ref B). (Note: Al-Faraj later provided some consulting on this planning process. End note.)

¶7. (C/NF) Despite this increased awareness, Al-Faraj believed Kuwait was "woefully unprepared" to deal with the threat from Iran. (Comment: Al-Faraj describes himself as a pessimist and admits that he generally presents the "worst-case scenario," which is likely reflected in his analysis. End comment.) He was "absolutely certain that Iranian intelligence forces have the capacity to strike exposed targets in Kuwait," and said Kuwait lacked the resources to deal with large-scale demonstrations of the "80,000" Iranian expatriate workers in Kuwait. (Comment: Other contacts, including Iranian expats, estimate the Iranian population in Kuwait to be between fifty and sixty thousand. It is unlikely that this community, the majority of whom are manual laborers, would participate in pro-Iran demonstrations if tensions escalate. End comment.) He "(did) not believe the GCC has the capability to effectively police a sanctions area." Al-Faraj claimed there was a "lack of seriousness" about the Iranian threat among some senior Kuwaiti ministerial officials, who were hesitant to pursue contingency planning in the hope that the problem would resolve itself. Al-Faraj dismissed reports that Kuwait has drafted a Non-Aggression Agreement with Iran (ref A) as

"nonsense."

18. (C/NF) Despite the convergence of views on Iran, Al-Faraj complained about GCC countries' lack of strategic vision and noted that the GCC position on Iran was often contradictory. For example, while the GCC supports a peaceful resolution to tensions over Iran's nuclear program, Gulf countries oppose the P5 1 incentive package, not wanting Iran to have these benefits, he claimed. In addition, Al-Faraj said some smaller GCC countries are concerned that Iran will be weakened too much, leaving Saudi Arabia in a stronger position in the Gulf. "While government officials in GCC countries will not yet admit it, there is a growing awareness that they will ultimately have to choose between a nuclear Iran and a non-nuclear Iran, between Iran and the U.S. There is no question what they will choose: they would sell Iran in a heartbeat. Ultimately, your objectives and ours are the same," he concluded.

GCC Can and Should Play Stronger Role in Iraq

19. (C/NF) Al-Faraj said the Lebanon conflict also increased GCC countries' "seriousness" about providing economic assistance to Iraq to counter Iranian influence there. He believed the GCC could play a much more constructive role in Iraq's economic development, which would consequently increase the GCC's clout and influence in the country. According to him, Gulf states were initially wary of a Shi'a-dominated government, but have been reassured by senior Iraqi Shi'a clerics' calls for calm and moderation, and have slowly acquiesced to the idea of a Shi'a-led Iraq. GCC countries can always appeal to Iraqis' Arab identity to draw them away from Iran, Al-Faraj said.

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